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Soviet-Japanese Relations: 1931-1938

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THE clash at Changkufeng on the Korean-Soviet frontier last August dramatized the conflict between Japan and the U.S.S.R. which has constituted such an important factor in Far Eastern politics since 1931. For two weeks these hostilities, although occurring on a localized terrain, assumed proportions which threatened to develop into a general war. The very severity of this test of arms, however, seems to have diminished rather than increased the likelihood of a further engagement in the immediate future.

Japanese-Soviet friction, in its surface aspects, has expressed itself over an extraordinarily wide group of subjects. At various times in recent years, controversy has been waged over the Chinese Eastern Railway, the Kamchatka fisheries, Outer Mongolia, Japanese oil and coal concessions in North Sakhalin, the Manchoukuo-Soviet borders, and the Comintern. This list of major subjects, moreover, gives no hint of the continuous succession of minor annoyances which have kept the diplomats of the two countries busy. However trivial the points at issue may be, they generate an unusual amount of heat and become "charged with overtones in Japan, in the Soviet Union, and in the world at large."¹ Underlying these issues is the dramatic contrast between the social-economic systems of the two countries. Japan, an age-old monarchy, is motivated by a dynamic imperialism which reached explosive force in 1931 and has driven it forward on a program of continental conquest. The Soviet Union has watched the gradual unfolding of this program, which has ringed the Siberian and Outer Mongolian borders with Japanese troops, with an apprehension which seems not unjustified. Japan, on the other hand, has viewed the new socialist order in the U.S.S.R. as a threat to its old-established Imperial institutions and its capitalist system. With a vigor matched only in Germany and Italy, the ruling circles of Japan denounce the Com-

munist International as a world menace, and rigidly suppress every sign of communism at home.²

Each successive crisis in Soviet-Japanese relations has given rise to widespread speculation and surmise in the outside world. Many foreign observers have believed that an ultimate armed conflict between these powers was inevitable, however long it might be postponed. This view has never been supported by the responsible authorities at Moscow. Soviet spokesmen have repeatedly declared that they do not consider war with Japan "fatalistically inevitable."³ At the same time, they have coupled this statement with the assertion that the U.S.S.R. would defend every inch of its territory, if and when attacked. Occasional belligerent declarations by firebrands like General Sadao Araki suggest that some, at least, of Japan's military leaders feel that such an attack must be made, but Japan's more responsible leaders have thus far managed to restrain their military before it was too late.

Antagonism between Japan and the U.S.S.R., strong and persistent though it has been, has not prevented the solution of some difficult issues since 1931. As a rule, however, their successive controversies have been marked by repetition of a stereotyped pattern—dispute, crisis, and *détente* without full solution. A severe crisis has usually been succeeded by a protracted lull. Initial Soviet apprehension over Japan's occupation of Manchuria in 1931-1933 was followed by a critical two-year period during which

1. Kathleen Barnes, "Japanese-Soviet Friction," *Far Eastern Survey* (New York, American Council, Institute of Pacific Relations), September 25, 1935, p. 148.

2. Communism in China is also often alleged to be a menace to Japan. Since 1927, however, the Communist movement in China has been almost purely indigenous, and has had little or no assistance from Russia. Japan's argument would have more weight if the Japanese authorities had lent their assistance to Chiang Kai-shek during his long and bitter struggle with the Chinese Communists from 1930 to 1936. Instead, they chose that period to seize Manchuria and advance into North China, until the growing menace of Japanese aggression to China's national existence finally induced the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communists to lay aside their antagonism and join in a common defense of their country. Japan's real aim has apparently been to seize Chinese territories rather than to fight Chinese communism.

3. W. L. Holland and Kate L. Mitchell, *Problems of the Pacific*, 1936 (University of Chicago Press, 1938), p. 141.

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negotiations for sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway were being completed. Border conflicts next became the central issue and threatened serious conflict in 1935-1936, until the U.S.S.R. made public its mutual assistance pact with the Mongolian People's Republic. A relatively peaceful interlude, during which the vexed fisheries question was virtually disposed of by a new eight-year convention, was shattered by announcement of the German-Japanese "anti-Comintern" pact. Since then, after successive lulls, there have been the sharp Amur islands incident and the Changkufeng hostilities.

These issues have often seemed to threaten war; in the end, Japan has always directed its attention southward and advanced further into China. There has meanwhile been a gradual shift in the relative strength of the two powers. Up to 1935, the U.S.S.R. was forced to make a series of concessions, of which the sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway was most prominent. Since then, while the Soviet Union has still proved willing to settle outstanding issues by negotiation, it has defended its position with increasing boldness.

MANCHOUKUO: THE INITIAL SOVIET REACTION

The moment for Japan's armed assault on Manchuria—September 18, 1931—was carefully timed. Not since 1914 had the world situation presented the Japanese military with such a free hand in the Far East. Europe and America were in the throes of economic depression. Britain was entering on a government crisis precipitated by abandonment of the gold standard. China was torn by civil strife,⁴ while its central provinces were devastated by the Yangtze River flood. The U.S.S.R. was effectively immobilized. The first five-year plan was still in process of completion, and the critical era of agricultural collectivization was not yet over. At the end of 1931, in the sphere of foreign politics, the Soviet Union had but partly emerged from its period of isolation. Siberia was relatively undefended, not only in the purely military sense but also in the item of economic and industrial preparation.

Japan was thus enabled to round out its conquest of Manchuria without serious fear of intervention by the U.S.S.R.—the power closest to the field of action, and with interests most directly affected. Military occupation of cities and towns in South Manchuria was rapidly extended to the strategic centers of the so-called Russian sphere in North Manchuria.⁵⁻⁶ By February 1932 Japanese

4. The rival Nanking and Canton régimes had armies in the field, and the Nanking government was engaged in its first campaigns against the Chinese Communist forces.

5-6. *Report of the Commission of Enquiry* (Lytton Report), League of Nations, C.663.M.320.1932.VII., pp. 71-80.

troops had occupied Harbin and Tsitsihar, the two largest cities on the Soviet-owned Chinese Eastern Railway. In March the new "state" and government of Manchoukuo were formally established. Japanese military operations, carried on during the rest of the year against remnants of the former Chinese armies, spread over large areas of Manchuria north of the Chinese Eastern Railway and carried Japan's armed forces to the Siberian frontier. In March 1933 the Inner Mongolian province of Jehol was added to the expanding territory of Manchoukuo. The period of eighteen months, during which Japan was establishing its new position in Manchuria, had served to increase Soviet-Japanese hostility and given rise to occasions of severe tension. At the same time, the course of events had tended to confirm the inability or unwillingness of the U.S.S.R. to take forceful measures in defense of its threatened interests.

During the early stages of Japan's Manchurian occupation, the Soviet authorities had sought to obtain Japanese assurances against the spread of hostilities to North Manchuria. When Tsitsihar and Harbin were occupied by Japanese forces, however, Moscow reconciled itself to the *fait accompli*. Thus, at the very outset, it surrendered the right to challenge Japan's invasion of the traditional Russian sphere of interest in Manchuria. There remained merely the possibility of a rear-guard defense of the Soviet economic stake, principally the Chinese Eastern Railway, which depreciated rapidly as soon as Japan's military-political control was established. Scope for threats and counter-threats still existed,⁷⁻⁸ but Japan was well aware that it held the upper hand within Manchuria. In line with its basic policy, the U.S.S.R. continuously attempted to settle all essential issues by realistic and practical compromise. The establishment of Manchoukuo had created a delicate problem for Moscow, involving Soviet relations both with China and Japan. Although the Soviet Union consistently refused to accord *de jure* recognition to the new state, it accommodated itself to the *de facto* situation. In March 1932 the Soviet government accepted the appointment of Li Shao-keng, a Manchoukuo nominee, as president of the board of directors of the Chinese Eastern Railway.⁹ Later it also permitted Manchoukuo consuls to take up their posts in several cities of the Soviet Far East.

The Soviet government's conciliatory attitude was

7-8. For detailed analysis of Soviet-Japanese difficulties over Manchurian issues in 1931-1932, cf. Vera Micheles Dean, "The Soviet Union and Japan in the Far East," *Foreign Policy Reports*, August 17, 1932, pp. 141-46.

9. Although the U.S.S.R. owned the Chinese Eastern Railway, it shared the management with China. Manchoukuo was taking over China's rights.

most clearly expressed in its persistent effort to conclude a non-aggression pact with Japan. A proposal to this effect was broached to Mr. Yoshizawa in Moscow as early as December 1931. The Japanese diplomat was then en route from Geneva to Tokyo, where he was to assume the post of Foreign Minister in the newly formed Seiyukai Cabinet. Despite this propitious setting, the reaction in Tokyo was distinctly negative when the Soviet proposal was considered in mid-January.¹⁰ The issue was again raised by Mr. Troyanovsky, Soviet Ambassador at Tokyo, in October 1932, with the same result.¹¹ Further diplomatic exchanges occurred at Moscow on November 4, when Mr. Matsuoka discussed the subject with high Soviet officials.¹² Official Japanese rejection of these various overtures by Moscow occurred on January 21, 1933, when Foreign Minister Uchida declared to the Diet that, given the existence of the Pact of Paris and the Soviet-Japanese treaty of 1925, there was no need for a pact of non-aggression.¹³ These successive rebuffs strengthened the Soviet Union's fears that the Japanese military were building up a base in Manchuria from which an attack on the Soviet maritime provinces would eventually be launched.

Soviet diplomacy had meanwhile been active in other spheres, with more concrete results. On November 5, 1932 it was reported that W. W. Yen, Chinese delegate at Geneva, had approached Maxim Litvinov, Soviet Foreign Commissar, with a proposal for resumption of Soviet-Chinese relations, which had been suspended in 1927.¹⁴ This proposal led, on December 12, 1932, to an exchange of notes restoring diplomatic relations between the two countries.¹⁵ In a press statement M. Litvinov declared that, for the Soviet Union, which was "free of all secret political combinations and agreements," an improvement in relations with one state did not imply deterioration of relations with another.¹⁶ Despite this reassurance, the resumption of Soviet-Chinese relations was received with ill grace at Tokyo, where the Foreign Office spokesman declared that the news was "most unwelcome" and that the "elements most disturbing to the peace of the world have now joined hands."¹⁷ This diplo-

matic achievement, clearly the result of Japanese aggression in Manchuria, was distinctly encouraging to the Soviet Union.

During this period the U.S.S.R. had also indirectly strengthened its hand in the Far East by active diplomatic efforts in Europe. In 1932 and 1933 the Soviet government had concluded a series of bilateral non-aggression pacts with France, Poland and the Baltic states, as well as multilateral pacts with Baltic and Near Eastern states and the Little Entente.¹⁸ Franco-Soviet relations were steadily improving. Neither these agreements nor the resumption of Soviet relations with China, however, effected any significant alteration of the military balance of power in the Far East. In 1932-1933 the U.S.S.R. had taken the first steps to strengthen its military position in Siberia. Additional troops had been concentrated in the Soviet maritime provinces; the mechanical equipment—airplanes, tanks and motor trucks—of these forces had been improved; and work on the double-tracking of the Trans-Siberian Railway had begun.¹⁹ These preliminary measures, an earnest of later and much more extensive activity in the same direction, had not yet reached the stage at which the Soviet authorities were confident of their ability to handle a Japanese attack. The next phase of the Soviet-Japanese diplomatic game, therefore, in which the still existing Russian interests in Manchuria constituted the pawns, witnessed Soviet policy still adhering to its previously cautious rôle.

LIQUIDATION OF SOVIET INTERESTS IN MANCHURIA

By the spring of 1933 the U.S.S.R. had apparently become convinced that, under the conditions created by the Japanese occupation, the wisest policy would be to cut its losses in Manchoukuo and retire as gracefully as possible. Soviet trade organizations in Manchuria had already wound up their affairs and withdrawn a year earlier.²⁰ The Chinese Eastern Railway, however, was a much more important economic prize, which the Soviet Union was not so readily prepared to relinquish. A traditional Russian holding, it represented a sizeable investment and involved the livelihood of several thousand Soviet employees.

Important as these factors were, they had to be squared with the well-nigh intolerable situation that had developed since September 18, 1931. The Soviet attempt to share the management of the Chinese Eastern Railway with Manchoukuo had

10. Arnold J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs, 1931* (London, Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 155; 1932, p. 535; also *New York Herald Tribune*, January 17, 1932.

11. *New York Herald Tribune*, October 19, 1932.

12. *Ibid.*, November 5, 1932.

13. *New York Times*, January 21, 1933.

14. *New York Times*, November 5, 1932.

15. For texts of notes, cf. *The China Year Book, 1933*, pp. 655-657.

16. *Soviet Union Review*, January 1933, p. 2.

17. Toynbee, 1932, p. 537.

18. Cf. Vera Micheles Dean, "The Soviet Union as a European Power," *Foreign Policy Reports*, August 2, 1933.

19. Toynbee, 1932, pp. 436-37.

20. Cf. Vera Micheles Dean, "The Soviet Union and Japan in the Far East," cited, p. 145.

never worked satisfactorily. Armed gangs continually raided the line,²¹ wrecks were frequent, and Soviet officials complained that the Manchoukuo authorities took no adequate measures to protect the railway. The Japanese-controlled railway system, including the former Chinese lines and new extensions, enabled traffic to be diverted from the Chinese Eastern Railway. The latter's profits disappeared, and Vladivostok's importance as an outlet for Manchurian produce sharply declined. On April 8, 1933 the Manchoukuo authorities severed connections of the Chinese Eastern at the border stations of Manchouli and Pogranichnaya, and announced that the blockade would continue until the Soviet Union had returned rolling-stock which, they alleged, had been illegally detained on Soviet territory.²²

This incident forced the hand of the Soviet Union. Realizing that the Chinese Eastern Railway had become more of a liability than an asset, the Soviet government offered on May 2 to sell the line. Japan replied that such a sale would have to be concluded with Manchoukuo, and magnanimously proffered its good offices. After some hesitation the Soviet Union accepted this condition, and on June 26 Soviet-Manchoukuo negotiations opened in Tokyo under the aegis of the Japanese authorities. These events called forth a protest from the Nanking government, which pointed out that alienation of the railway to third parties was barred by the Sino-Soviet agreement of 1924. M. Litvinov retorted that the U.S.S.R. was confronted with a *de facto* situation in which the Manchoukuo authorities were "actually carrying out the rights and obligations accruing to the Chinese side" from the 1924 agreement.²³

The Chinese protest was not allowed to interfere with the railway negotiations, which continued for nearly two years at Tokyo before agreement was finally reached. Two serious crises marked the course of the negotiations. In the first case, arrests of Soviet railway officials in September 1933 by Manchoukuo authorities coincided with publication in Moscow of four documents, signed by Japanese officials, which purported to outline plans for seizing the railway by force.²⁴ An even more seri-

ous crisis developed a year later.²⁵ In August 1934 several score Soviet railway employees were arrested on charges of a "plot" to assassinate high Japanese and Manchoukuo officials.²⁶ On August 22 the Soviet government protested sharply against "the aggressive intentions of some official Japanese circles" and declared that the U.S.S.R. "expects that the Japanese government will make all necessary inferences."²⁷ This firm stand was backed by vigorous statements in the Soviet press, the effect was soon apparent at Tokyo, and tension had considerably eased by early September.

Foreign Minister Hirota utilized this opportunity to press forward with the sale negotiations, and by September 26 agreement on the price of the railway was reported.²⁸ Further negotiations affecting important details, especially a Japanese guarantee of the payments to be made by Manchoukuo, occupied six months. The final agreement was signed in Tokyo on March 23, 1935.²⁹ The sale price of the railway and appertaining properties was fixed at 140 million yen (in current yen exchange, i.e., rather less than 30 cents); an additional sum of 30 million yen was allotted to the Soviet employees of the railway in retirement allowances and other payments. One-third of the sale price was made payable in cash, of which one-half was to be transferred on the signing of the agreement and the rest in four installments within three years. The remaining two-thirds was met in the form of goods to be ordered by the Soviet Union within six months from Japan or Manchoukuo, and delivered over a three-year period. The sum paid for the railway was considerably better than the 50 million yen first offered by the Japanese-Manchoukuo author-

25. In the interval the status of the Chinese Eastern Railway had steadily deteriorated. An official report to the railway's governing board, presented early in August 1934 by Ivan Rudi, Soviet general manager, summarized conditions from January 1 to August 6, 1934 as follows: 16 trains wrecked by planned damage to the tracks; 91 armed raids on railway stations and barracks; 116 railway employees arrested or kidnapped; 9 bridges damaged; 46 murders, including 9 of railway agents; 102 persons injured, including 83 railway agents; 42 robberies suffered by railway employees; 22 cases of arson affecting railway property; 21 locomotives and 207 coaches damaged; total physical losses of 300,000 gold rubles, apart from the loss in revenue. Mr. Rudi's report concluded by stating that, despite appeals to the Manchoukuo military authorities, he had received no aid to supplement the forces at his disposal for the protection of life and property. Cf. *New York Herald Tribune*, *New York Times*, August 12, 1934.

26. *New York Herald Tribune*, August 14, 23, 26, 1934.

27. *New York Times*, August 24, 1934.

28. *Ibid.*, September 26, 1934.

29. The sale agreement and two protocols were supplemented by an exchange of notes between the U.S.S.R. and Japan, by which the latter guaranteed fulfillment of the sale terms by Manchoukuo. For texts of these documents, cf. Violet Conolly, *Soviet Trade from the Pacific to the Levant* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1935), Appendix VIII, pp. 200-220.

21. For evidence that these gangs were directed by the Special Service Section of the Kwantung Army, cf. Amleto Vespa, *Secret Agent of Japan* (Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1938), pp. 52-53, 83, 110.

22. For details, cf. *The Soviet Union Review*, June 1933, p. 132.

23. Cf. statement by M. Litvinov, *ibid.*, May 11, 1933, p. 134; for the Chinese argument, cf. C. C. Wang, "The Chinese Eastern Railway," *Foreign Affairs*, October 1933.

24. For details, cf. T. A. Bisson, "The New Status in the Pacific," *Foreign Policy Reports*, January 17, 1934, p. 267.

ities, although far below the original Soviet demand of 250 million gold rubles and still more the estimated construction cost of 410 million gold rubles.³⁰ On the other hand, the railway's value had seriously depreciated, it constituted a grave political liability, and in the circumstances the Soviet authorities may well have been satisfied with salvaging as much as they had.

Successful consummation of this agreement, indeed, rested in part at least on the relatively stronger position which the U.S.S.R. had attained by the spring of 1935—a fact which did not pass unnoticed in Japan. The second five-year plan, then at the half-way mark, was rounding out an economic transformation which had materially strengthened the industrial basis of Soviet armaments. Agricultural collectivization—still in its initial stages on September 18, 1931—was an accomplished fact by 1935, and was beginning to show significant results in increased total crop yield. The change in the Soviet Union's international status, already evident by the spring of 1933, had gone much further two years later. Diplomatic relations between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. had been established on November 16, 1933; the Soviet Union had joined the League of Nations, with a permanent seat on the Council, on September 18, 1934; while on May 2, 1935 the Franco-Soviet treaty of mutual assistance was signed at Paris, and two weeks later a similar pact was concluded by Czechoslovakia and the U.S.S.R. These various arrangements, particularly as regards the Soviet Union's relations with the League, France and Czechoslovakia, had been conditioned in large measure by the rise of Nazi Germany, which represented an increasingly potent threat on the western borders of the U.S.S.R. Henceforth the Soviet Union's defensive preparations had to take account of two formidable antagonists, one in the east and the other in the west.

This consideration dictated greater stress on the development of an independent Far Eastern Army as one feature of accelerated Soviet military preparations during the 1933-1935 period. As early as 1929 the Soviet Far Eastern Army had been constituted as an independent military establishment, distinct from the regular Red Army. Until the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, however, relatively slight attention had been devoted to the Soviet military forces in the Far East. After 1931 this policy was radically altered, and deficiencies both

in numbers and equipment of the Far Eastern forces were rapidly made good. Toward the end of 1934 foreign military experts estimated the Soviet Far Eastern Army at 200,000 men, with an additional 150,000 reservists settled on the land.³¹ Fortifications and military bases were constructed at Pogradichnaya, Blagoveschensk, and Khabarovsk; air bases were laid out at Spassk, Vladivostok and Khabarovsk; and an undisclosed number of airplanes and submarines were sent to the Far East.

Meanwhile the economic development of the Soviet Far East, as determined by the first and second five-year plans, was rapidly progressing. By 1928 the productive output of the Soviet Far East, as in the rest of the Union, had reached pre-war levels. During the next eight years, capital investment in the Far Eastern Region alone aggregated more than 5 billion rubles, while comparable sums were being invested in the contiguous regions of Siberia.³² Railway construction, involving such projects as the double-tracking of the Trans-Siberian Railway and the building of a new line from Lake Baikal to a point on the Sea of Okhotsk, constituted but one aspect of a comprehensive program of economic development. Water, air and road transport were simultaneously improved,³³ and the Northern Sea Route developed.³⁴ Industrial exploitation of the Far Eastern region stressed mining (coal, gold, oil, non-ferrous metals, molybdenum), lumbering, fishing and power generation, including development of a large-scale metallurgical base and various engineering enterprises (automobile repair, agricultural machinery, oil refining, wood-working, ship-building).³⁵ In agriculture the total sown area of the Far Eastern Region, amounting to but 702,300 hectares in 1913, had increased to 1,068,200 hectares by 1935.³⁶ This total area was almost entirely collectivized and was largely serviced by machine-tractor stations. In the adjoining regions of Siberia, the pace of industrial and agricultural development was no less rapid and comprehensive during these years.³⁷ Soviet spokesmen stress the peaceful character of this economic ad-

31. *New York Times*, September 14, 1934.

32. Cf. E. Raikhman and B. Vvedinsky, "The Resources and Economic Development of the Soviet Far East," *Problems of the Pacific*, 1936 (University of Chicago Press, 1937), Document III, p. 286.

33. Raikhman and Vvedinsky, cited, pp. 321-324.

34. Cf. Semion Jaffe, "The Northern Sea Route as a Transport Problem," U.S.S.R. Council Papers, Number 5 (Moscow, U.S.S.R. Council, 1936).

35. Raikhman and Vvedinsky, cited, pp. 308-320.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 324-332.

37. Cf. Kathleen Barnes, "Siberia—From Mongolia to the Arctic," *Far Eastern Survey*, May 6, 1936; also "The Agricultural Foundation of Siberia's Economy," *ibid.*, February 17, 1937.

30. Estimate by C. F. Remer, *Foreign Investments in China* (New York, Macmillan, 1933), p. 593. In addition to construction costs, Remer notes that large additional sums, some of which were indicated by reported deficits of 178 million rubles, had been expended on the railway by Russian governments of the past.

vance and maintain that it is merely one phase of, and coordinated with, the general development of the U.S.S.R.; they admit, however, that after 1931 "international relations accelerated the tempo" of the movement in the Soviet Far East.³⁸ It is, of course, beyond dispute that the enhanced economic strength of this region contributes materially to the self-sufficiency of the Soviet Far Eastern Army.

Within this 1933-1935 period, the striking power of the Japanese military forces south of the Amur River had been greatly increased by the construction of several new railway and highway lines in Manchoukuo.³⁹ The Korean port of Rashin, which has been enlarged and re-equipped, was by September 1933 directly linked to the Manchurian railway system, enabling Japanese troops to reach North Manchuria from Japan some twenty-four hours sooner than by way of Dairen. In December 1934 work was completed on a new railway running directly north from Harbin to Heiho, a town opposite Blagoveschensk on the Amur and roughly in the center of the projecting salient into Siberia constituted by Manchoukuo. Still a third railway, linking Yenki in northeastern Korea with Hailin on the Chinese Eastern Railway, was supplemented by military highways from Hailin to the Sungari and along that river nearly to its junction with the Amur at Khabarovsk. Under these conditions "the Amur, which till recently had been a remote and, from a military point of view, relatively inaccessible frontier, had by 1934 become merely a thread separating two highly equipped forces. . . ."⁴⁰

On both sides of the Manchoukuo-Siberian frontier, the respective military preparations were viewed with apprehension, verging at times on acute alarm. Japanese spokesmen continually decried the concentration of Soviet troops on the Manchurian frontier. In September 1934 Tamekichi Ota, the Japanese Ambassador at Moscow, submitted an informal suggestion for establishment of a "demilitarized zone" taking in 25 miles on each side of the Soviet-Manchoukuo border.⁴¹ The proposal was shrewdly conceived, since it would have razed the Soviet fortifications and left the Trans-Siberian Railway and certain large cities on the arc of the Amur salient defenseless, while affecting little of importance on the Manchoukuo

side of the frontier. After "a storm of indignant comment" in the Soviet press, the proposal was quietly shelved.⁴² Apprehension on Moscow's part was equally evident, especially with respect to the new Manchurian railways running up to the Soviet frontier, and received heated expression on occasions of tension during these years.⁴³ Such statements, however, were reserved for times considered to be specially critical by Moscow; in the main, Soviet policy, as in 1931-1933, continued to stress the desirability of a non-aggression pact. Tokyo's reaction to such proposals was, as before, consistently negative. In December 1934 Foreign Minister Hirota was maintaining that settlement of "outstanding differences," presumably railway issues and frontier disputes, must precede negotiations for a non-aggression pact.⁴⁴ Soviet spokesmen failed to see why the better atmosphere consequent on the signing of a non-aggression pact would not facilitate settlement of specific disputes.⁴⁵ After agreement was reached on the sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway, moreover, the Japanese authorities evinced no greater willingness than before to enter into a pact of non-aggression with the U.S.S.R.

JAPAN KNOCKS AT OUTER MONGOLIA'S DOOR

Early in 1935, prior to the sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway, the center of acute Soviet-Japanese tension had shifted to the Manchoukuo-Outer Mongolia frontier. For nearly eighteen months, until the spring of 1936, recurring clashes on this border alternated with parleys at which the Japanese-Manchoukuo representatives made determined efforts to "open up" Outer Mongolia.

The first of these clashes occurred on January 24, 1935 at Khalkha Miao, a small town on the northeastern shore of Lake Buir Nor.⁴⁶ Efforts to set up an Outer Mongolian-Manchurian conference for settlement of this incident were delayed by Japanese demands that the agenda should include the item of opening Outer Mongolia to the subjects of Japan and Manchoukuo, particularly for purposes of "travel, residence and business."⁴⁷ The conference finally met on June 3 at the town of Manchouli.

42. Toynbee, 1934, p. 669.

43. Cf. *New York Times*, February 4 and 12, 1934, for belligerent speeches by Klementi Voroshilov, Soviet War Commissar, and Vassily Bluecher, commander-in-chief of the Soviet Far Eastern Army, during the All-Union Communist Party Congress at Moscow in January-February 1934.

44. Toynbee, 1934, p. 668.

45. Holland and Mitchell, *Problems of the Pacific*, 1936, cited, pp. 143-144, 146.

46. For details, cf. T. A. Bisson, "Outer Mongolia: A New Danger Zone in the Far East," *Foreign Policy Reports*, November 20, 1935, p. 229; see also 230-231.

47. *The Trans-Pacific* (Tokyo), February 21, 1935, p. 8.

38. Holland and Mitchell, *Problems of the Pacific*, 1936, cited, p. 131.

39. By 1935 new railway construction totalled 2,763.4 kilometers and new highways 5,475 kilometers. John R. Stewart, *Manchuria Since 1931* (New York, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1936), pp. 19-22.

40. Toynbee, 1936, p. 671.

41. *New York Times*, September 13, 14, 1934.

For more than two months the Outer Mongolian delegates, despite intense pressure, steadfastly insisted on restricting the negotiations to settlement of the border incidents. On July 4, following the arrest of a Japanese surveying party in the Buir Nor region by Mongolian guards, Kwantung Army officers assisted in handing a note to the Mongolian delegation which was backed by a threat to "demilitarize" eastern Outer Mongolia.⁴⁸⁻⁴⁹ On July 13 the Mongolian authorities formally rejected the Japanese-Manchoukuo demands, and suggested that a joint Manchurian-Mongolian frontier commission should be established to deal with border incidents.⁵⁰⁻⁵¹ Five days later the Japanese-Manchurian side requested an "exchange of resident representatives."⁵² The Mongolian authorities countered on July 29 with a proposal that such representatives should be stationed at prescribed points near the boundary and should deal only with border disputes. With this issue still unsettled, the conference adjourned in mid-August.

When the conference resumed on October 2, the Manchoukuo delegation insisted that three representatives from each side should be posted in the principal cities of each country. Resistance to this demand was met by renewed threats of force from the Japanese member of the Manchoukuo delegation.⁵³ The Foreign Office spokesman at Tokyo, questioned by press correspondents on October 21, did not conceal the fact that the Japanese government approved these efforts to open Outer Mongolia. He declared that "Manchoukuo was now knocking at Outer Mongolia's door as Commodore Perry knocked at Japan's door in 1858."⁵⁴ Events took a more serious turn in December, when further hostilities in the Buir Nor region were accompanied by provocative statements from Japanese military circles in Manchoukuo.⁵⁵ At this time several Outer Mongolian leaders were conferring with high Soviet officials in Moscow.

During the early months of 1936, the frontier controversies reached an explosive stage and were transformed into a direct Soviet-Japanese issue. A succession of border incidents in January and February involved hostilities on both the Soviet-Manchoukuo and the Mongolian-Manchoukuo frontiers. Months earlier, in August 1935, the So-

viet Ambassador at Tokyo, Konstantin Yurenev, had proposed establishment of a joint Soviet-Japanese border commission.⁵⁶ The Japanese authorities made no response, and on February 24 B. Stomoniakov, Soviet Vice Commissar of Foreign Affairs, reiterated the proposal,⁵⁷ but the military uprising at Tokyo temporarily intervened. On March 4, in a considered statement to Roy W. Howard at Moscow, Joseph Stalin declared categorically that the Soviet Union would come to the aid of Outer Mongolia in case it was attacked by Japan.⁵⁸ A few days later the Japanese authorities finally responded to the Soviet proposal for a joint border commission, but restricted its application to a short 200-mile section of the Soviet-Manchoukuo frontier running from Lake Khanka to the Korean border. The U.S.S.R. continued to urge that the work of the commission be extended to the whole of the border regions, including those of Outer Mongolia.⁵⁹ Unconfirmed reports of a treaty of mutual assistance between the U.S.S.R. and Outer Mongolia, published on March 27, were followed immediately by the largest and most serious of the many clashes near Lake Buir Nor. One week after this conflict, on April 8, the text of a mutual assistance pact between the Soviet Union and Outer Mongolia, signed at Ulan Bator on March 12, was published at Moscow.⁶⁰ The preamble revealed that a "gentlemen's agreement" for mutual assistance in case of attack had existed between the two countries since November 1934.

Japan's army circles in Manchoukuo had at last forced the Soviet Union to show its hand with respect to Outer Mongolia, although the net result may have been somewhat unexpected. Their efforts to open Outer Mongolia collapsed forthwith, and have not been renewed since. Hopes that the improved conditions might lead to the establishment of border commissions, which would handle disputes and re-demarcate the frontiers, were not fulfilled. Although the commissions had been agreed upon in principle by the summer of 1936,⁶¹ they

56. Holland and Mitchell, *Problems of the Pacific*, 1936, cited, p. 142.

57. *Christian Science Monitor*, February 24, 1936.

58. *New York Times*, March 5, 1936.

59. *Christian Science Monitor*, March 17, 1936.

60. For text, cf. *New York Times*, April 8, 1936.

61. Holland and Mitchell, *Problems of the Pacific*, 1936, cited, p. 142. The Soviet authorities had agreed to a commission for dealing with disputes along the 200-mile border stretch suggested by the Japanese (*New York Times*, April 28, 1936); they had also agreed to a second commission for re-demarcation of this frontier zone, although they claimed this was unnecessary. Nevertheless, according to Soviet spokesmen, the Japanese had still postponed action on these commissions. One difficulty, apparently, was the Japanese demand that the commissions should contain equal representation for Japan, Manchoukuo and the U.S.S.R., i.e., a two-to-one majority for Japan.

48-49. The note demanded residence rights for military observers in Outer Mongolia, freedom of travel for Japanese-Manchoukuo nationals, and permission to run telegraph lines into Outer Mongolia. *New York Times*, July 7, 1935.

50-51. *The Trans-Pacific*, July 25, 1935, p. 11.

52. *New York Times*, July 19, 1935.

53. *Ibid.*, October 20, 1935.

54. *Ibid.*, October 22, 1935.

55. For details, cf. T. A. Bisson, "Struggle of the Powers in China," *Foreign Policy Reports*, August 1, 1936, p. 130.

were never formally constituted—and border incidents have continued.

THE "ANTI-COMINTERN" PACT

An era of improved Soviet-Japanese relations had been forecast in March 1935, following agreement on sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway to Manchoukuo.⁶² For a year thereafter, however, severe tension created by border disputes had negated this promise. In the summer of 1936, when the terms for constitution of Soviet-Japanese border commissions were being discussed, more hopeful prospects for a general readjustment of relations again came to the fore. With the railway and border issues cleared away, at least for the time being, negotiations for settlement of the problems connected with the North Sea fisheries and the North Sakhalin oil concessions were pushed forward with much greater success.

The terms of the Japanese oil concessions in North Sakhalin date from the Soviet-Japanese Convention of January 20, 1925, the basic treaty which established formal relations between Japan and the U.S.S.R.⁶³ A protocol attached to this convention granted Japanese concerns the right to exploit half the established oil fields "for 40 to 50 years" on a royalty basis.⁶⁴ In addition, the protocol allowed Japanese firms prospecting rights "for a period [of] from five to ten years" in a 43-square-mile area, with similar half-and-half exploitation privileges on new wells. By an agreement concluded in 1926, the prospective fields in this area were allotted, and the duration of the Japanese exploration rights fixed at ten years. This agreement, therefore, was scheduled to expire on December 31, 1936, and the Japanese authorities were seeking to renew it in the course of the 1935-1936 negotiations.

During the greater part of the 1926-1936 period, the Japanese had managed to obtain the bulk of the output of North Sakhalin oil. The supply from their own concessionaire fields was augmented by purchase of the output of Soviet-operated oil wells. By 1936 the rapid economic development of the Soviet Far East had changed this picture in important respects. With the increased industrialization of contiguous Soviet areas, and especially since the opening of a large oil refinery at Khabarovsk

in 1934,⁶⁵ the Soviet requirements for oil had greatly expanded. In 1928 the Sakhneft Trust of the U.S.S.R. began exploitation of the Soviet oil fields in North Sakhalin, and by 1933 the Soviet output virtually equalled that of the Japanese concessionaires.⁶⁶ Half the Soviet output was sold to Japan in 1933. During succeeding years, in which Soviet production considerably outstripped Japanese, much larger amounts were pre-empted by the Far Eastern Region. The proportion available for sale declined and, when the Japanese contract for purchase of the Soviet oil output expired, it was not renewed.⁶⁷ This condition led the Japanese to prize even more highly the agreement regarding prospecting rights in North Sakhalin, and to make greater efforts for its renewal before the expiration date of December 31, 1936. Negotiations on this issue were opened in 1935, when the U.S.S.R. agreed to a two-year extension. The Japanese authorities, however, were anxious to obtain a five-year extension, and continued to press this demand during the summer of 1936. On October 10, in an agreement signed at Moscow, the Soviet Union granted the longer term.⁶⁸

Equally satisfactory negotiations had meanwhile taken place on the even more thorny issue of Japanese fishing rights in Soviet waters. These rights, in accordance with Article 3 of the Soviet-Japanese treaty of 1925, had been comprehensively restated in the fishery convention signed at Moscow on January 23, 1928.⁶⁹ This convention, effective for eight years, entered into force five days after exchange of ratifications, i.e., May 27, 1928. Unless notice for revision was given a year prior to the date of expiration, it would remain in force a further twelve years.

A number of serious difficulties had arisen before May 27, 1936.⁷⁰ One cause of frequent disagreement was the ruble-yen exchange rate at which Japanese payments for the leased fishing grounds are calculated. In 1931 this rate had been

62. Cf. statements by Litvinov (*New York Herald Tribune*, March 15, 1935) and Hirota (*New York Times*, March 23, 1935).

63. For text, cf. League of Nations, *Treaty Series*, 1925, Vol. 34, No. 866, pp. 32-52. The convention also granted concessions for Japanese exploitation of certain coal fields in North Sakhalin, but these have not proved a serious source of friction.

64. Later fixed at 45 years, expiring in 1970.

65. The capacity of this refinery, which by 1938 consumed the entire Soviet output in North Sakhalin, appears to exceed available oil supplies, and new fields are being opened up in the Soviet Far East. *Far Eastern Survey*, September 7, 1938, p. 209.

66. *Ibid.*, May 8, 1935, p. 71; September 9, 1936, p. 206-07; September 7, 1938, p. 209. In 1927-28 the Soviet output was 2,250 barrels, and the Japanese output 510,000 barrels; in 1937 the respective figures were 2,430,000 barrels (Soviet) and 1,770,000 barrels (Japanese). It should be observed that Japan's supply of oil from its own wells in North Sakhalin had more than trebled during the 1928-1937 decade.

67. *Ibid.*, December 18, 1935, pp. 208-09.

68. *New York Herald Tribune*, October 11, 1936.

69. For text of fishery convention, cf. Conolly, *Soviet Trade from the Pacific to the Levant*, cited, Appendix VI, pp. 141-60.

70. For details, cf. *Far Eastern Survey*, September 25, 1935, p. 149.

fixed by mutual agreement at 32.5 sen to the ruble. The Soviet government claimed that the sharp depreciation of the yen, consequent upon Japan's departure from the gold standard in December 1931, had rendered the 1931 agreement inequitable. Controversy over this point recurred year after year. During the 1934 auctions the Soviet authorities demanded that the exchange rate be increased to 75 sen per ruble. The Japanese insisted on maintaining the old rate and, after a severe crisis, carried their point. This rate is still in effect.

On the Japanese side, the most serious grievance related to the yearly auction system by which Soviet and Japanese nationals bid for leases to the fishery lots. This problem, like the North Sakhalin oil concessions, had been rendered more difficult by growing Soviet industrial activity in the Far East. The Soviet fishing industry, which held fifth place in world catch in 1929, had advanced to second place—after Japan—in 1935.⁷¹ A considerable part of this expansion had occurred in Pacific waters.⁷² The number of Soviet fishing grounds off Kamchatka mounted from 40 in 1924 to 414 in 1935, while the Russian share of the joint Soviet-Japanese catch increased from 12.7 per cent in 1928 to 44 per cent in 1934.⁷³

Despite the testimony of these figures, there seems to be no real ground for Japanese press accusations that the Soviet government is ousting Japanese fishing interests from North Pacific waters. The number of fishing grounds worked by the Japanese increased from 245 in 1924 to 395 in 1935. The total Japanese catch in Kamchatka waters has also increased, until by 1934 it was virtually double that of pre-war years.⁷⁴ As in the case of Sakhalin oil, Soviet enterprise is capturing a larger proportion of a rapidly growing industry; simultaneously, total Japanese returns are also increasing greatly. The Kamchatka fisheries, moreover, constitute a relatively small part of the whole Japanese fishing industry—only 9 per cent in the 1931-1933 period, with but 17,506 out of 787,000 employees.⁷⁵

These considerations did not serve to mitigate Japanese anxiety over the progress of a young and

vigorous rival, nor to lessen mutual bad feeling caused by occasional incidents involving seizure of vessels, shooting affrays, and charges of illegal entry. In one respect, the Soviet government had early shown its willingness to meet the Japanese demand for greater security in the number and location of fishing grounds than was provided by the 1928 convention. This basic document had specified that leases for the fishery lots should be auctioned every February at Vladivostok, with an exception for lots leased by mutual agreement.⁷⁶ In 1932 the Soviet Union had signed a supplementary agreement, effective for the period of the convention, which had strengthened the original exception. Henceforth it was agreed that a major proportion of the fishing grounds should be leased annually to the Japanese without the formality of auction.⁷⁷ This agreement still left a certain amount of insecurity with regard to the total number of lots which the Japanese fishing interests would control in any given year.

In May 1935, the month when notice of termination was due, the Japanese authorities did not immediately request complete revision of the 1928 convention. They first expressed a desire to have a supplementary agreement drafted. In reply, Moscow suggested that the supplementary agreement of 1932 be extended, and that other points be considered later. At this the Japanese, apparently feeling that the scope of the changes they desired might be limited, gave notice that they preferred a complete revision.⁷⁸ Negotiations continued for a year without result. The original 1928 convention expired in May 1936, but was extended by agreement for the rest of that year. During the summer and early fall appreciable progress was reported, and agreement on a new convention was finally reached in November 1936.

The full details of this convention have never been revealed, although its terms are thought to have been favorable to the Japanese interests. Like the previous convention, it was to run for eight years; the Japanese had been pressing for a twelve-year period. It may possibly have included a continuance of the 32.5 sen per ruble rate, an offer made by the Soviet authorities at one time during the course of the negotiations.⁷⁹ The basic Japanese

71. Since then it has dropped to third, with the United States in second place.

72. More than one-fourth of the Soviet catch was taken in Far Eastern waters.

73. *Far Eastern Survey*, p. 240; June 17, 1936, p. 136.

74. *Ibid.*, June 17, 1936, p. 136.

75. *Ibid.*, May 22, 1935, p. 80. Their export importance is somewhat greater, since the Japanese catch in these waters consists mainly of export items—salmon, trout and crab. In 1933 Japan's catch in Kamchatka waters was valued at 23.7 million yen out of a total catch of 263.3 millions. *Ibid.*, September 25, 1935, p. 149.

76. Conolly, *Soviet Trade from the Pacific to the Levant*, cited, p. 142.

77. *Far Eastern Survey*, May 22, 1935, p. 80. In 1937 this proportion amounted to 280 fishery lots, or roughly three-fourths of the Japanese total. *Contemporary Japan*, March 1938, p. 781.

78. *Far Eastern Survey*, September 25, 1935, p. 149.

79. *Ibid.*, June 17, 1936, p. 136.

demand had called for an outright lease, effective during the full period of the treaty, on all fishery grounds held by Japanese interests in 1936. There is some ground for believing that this important concession was substantially granted by the U.S.S.R. in the draft convention.⁸⁰ Ratifications of the new convention were about to be exchanged when the conclusion of the German-Japanese "anti-Comintern pact" was announced in Berlin.

This news was not wholly unexpected. For several years past reports that a military alliance was under consideration had periodically appeared in the world press. In the spring of 1936 these reports became much more explicit, and were given substance by growing evidence of close relations between the military staffs of Japan and Germany.⁸¹ On May 1 Dr. Otto Kiep, head of a German economic mission to the Far East, signed a trade agreement with Manchoukuo providing for an exchange of German industrial equipment and Manchurian agricultural products.⁸² In August General von Reichenau, commander of the 7th German Army Corps, stopped in Japan in the course of an official tour of inspection to the Far East. His discussions at Tokyo with Japanese military officers "resulted in strengthening relations between the Japanese and German military establishments."⁸³

Negotiations relative to a more comprehensive and formal agreement had meanwhile been taking place at Berlin. Dr. Herbert von Dirksen and Colonel Eugen Ott, respectively the German Ambassador and Military Attaché at Tokyo, had returned to Germany to participate in these conferences.⁸⁴ Japan was represented in the negotiations by Major-General Oshima, Military Attaché at Berlin, and Toshio Shiratori, Japanese Minister to Sweden. Both Shiratori and Oshima were in the confidence of the extremist army circles in Japan, whose pressure apparently succeeded in overcoming qualms felt by the Foreign Office during the critical months before agreement was reached. There is no indication that Ambassador Mushakoji, the Foreign Office representative at Berlin, took a prominent part in the actual negotiations, although his name along with von Ribbentrop's appears as a signatory of the pact.

By the middle of November, despite continued

denials at Berlin and Tokyo, numerous press reports indicated that a German-Japanese agreement was about to be concluded. Secrecy as to its details was maintained up to the last moment, when most press comments still expected a full-fledged military alliance to materialize. Formal signature of what has since become known as the "anti-Comintern pact" took place in Berlin on November 25, 1936.⁸⁵ Under the terms of this pact, valid for five years, the parties merely agreed to exchange information on activities of the Communist International, confer "upon the necessary measures of defense," and invite other states to adopt similar "defensive measures" or to adhere to the pact. A protocol stated that a permanent German-Japanese Commission would be established to facilitate the objects of the agreement. On the same day a statement at Tokyo, issued by the Foreign Office, declared that the pact was directed solely against the "Comintern menace" and not "against the Soviet Union or any other specific country."⁸⁶

This assurance proved insufficient to allay the serious apprehensions aroused at Moscow, where officials took the attitude that the pact constituted, in effect, a military alliance destined to result in a combined German-Japanese attack on the U.S.S.R. Apprehension was not confined to Moscow. The German-Japanese pact was coldly received in London, and no less so in Washington.⁸⁷ These reactions did not pass beyond verbal statements. The U.S.S.R., however, immediately refused to ratify the Soviet-Japanese fisheries convention—a move which seriously embarrassed the Japanese government, already under heavy fire from virtually all groups in Japan save the military. On December 31, or within less than six weeks, the temporarily extended fisheries agreement was due to expire. During these weeks Japan exerted the full force of its diplomacy in an effort to obtain Soviet ratification of the new convention, which had entailed such lengthy negotiations and contained such favorable terms. This effort proved unsuccessful. In a protocol signed at Moscow on December 28, 1936, the Soviet and Japanese representatives again extended the original 1928 convention—this time for one year, or until December 31, 1937.⁸⁸

85. For text, cf. *Contemporary Japan*, December 1936, pp. 514-15.

86. *Ibid.*, pp. 515-17.

87. Correspondents speculated on the terms of secret provisions affecting the interests of Western European powers, including the possibility of an eventual division of the Dutch East Indies into German and Japanese spheres of influence. *New York Times*, November 26, 1936.

88. For text, cf. *Contemporary Japan*, March 1937, p. 704.

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-36; also January 6, 1937, p. 8.

81. *New York Times*, April 5, 1936.

82. *Christian Science Monitor*, May 1, 1936; for details, cf. *Far Eastern Survey*, September 9, 1936, p. 208.

83. *New York Herald Tribune*, August 26, 1936.

84. *Ibid.*, November 12, 1936. These men had again assumed their posts at Tokyo in October 1936, before the pact was made public.

THE WAR IN CHINA: SOVIET-JAPANESE ISSUES

Except for customary minor incidents, the early months of 1937 witnessed something of a *détente* in Soviet-Japanese relations. At the end of January the Hirota Cabinet was forced out of office. This crisis was caused, in part at least, both by the unpopularity of the German-Japanese pact and by Foreign Minister Arita's subsequent failure to obtain Soviet ratification of the new fisheries convention. The new Foreign Minister, Naotake Sato, attempted to steer a more liberal course in foreign policy, including an effort to improve relations with the U.S.S.R. Dr. Yurenev, Soviet Ambassador to Japan, had meanwhile been recalled to Moscow, where he had conferred with government and diplomatic officials on the new situation created by the "anti-Comintern" pact. After his return to Tokyo on April 14, he had engaged in a series of conversations with Foreign Minister Sato.

While the details of these discussions were not revealed, there is evidence to show that the Soviet Ambassador adopted a strong stand. He may possibly have suggested termination of the German-Japanese pact as a condition to settlement of the pending fisheries and border issues.⁸⁹ Mr. Sato had no success in resurrecting the fisheries treaty, nor in constituting a border commission to include both Japanese and Manchoukuo representatives, who would outvote the Russians two to one.⁹⁰⁻⁹¹ If the Soviet Ambassador offered to trade these concessions for abolition of the German-Japanese pact, he too was unsuccessful. The meetings ended without result, and on May 15 Dr. Yurenev left Tokyo for his new post at Berlin.

On April 30, while these talks were proceeding, Japan's army circles had suffered a severe electoral defeat. The new Cabinet formed by Prince Konoye on June 3, however, was dominated by a group of strongly conservative Ministers, with Koki Hirota in the Foreign Office. Three weeks later, the Kwantung Army in Manchoukuo became involved with Soviet military forces in a grave dispute over two islands in the Amur River. Both sides laid claim to the islands, and each accused the other of precipitating the incident.⁹²⁻⁹³ On June 29, while preliminary agreement on mutual withdrawal was being reached at Moscow, a sharp clash occurred in the Amur River.⁹⁴⁻⁹⁵ Large forces were rapidly

massed on both sides of the disputed river area, and on July 2 a four billion ruble loan for "consolidation of national defense" was reported from Moscow. On the following day M. Shigemitsu, Japanese Ambassador at Moscow, and Foreign Commissar Litvinov reached a definite settlement, following explicit assurances from the Ambassador that the Japanese naval cutters had retired from the vicinity of the islands.⁹⁶ The Commissariat of Defense at Moscow immediately issued an order for withdrawal of Soviet naval vessels and for evacuation of Soviet border patrols from the islands. The disputed sovereignty of the islands was reserved for later consideration. Japanese circles hailed this settlement, not only as a victory, but as proof that the execution of eight Russian army officers, which had occurred a few weeks earlier, had seriously affected the strength of the Soviet armed forces. On the other hand, the intervention of Emperor Hirohito on July 2, apparently in an effort to restrain the Kwantung Army, signified that the more cautious elements at Tokyo were equally unwilling to push the dispute to extremes.

Four days later the Liukouchiao incident near Peiping ushered in the Sino-Japanese war. The war in China greatly enlarged the potential sources of Soviet-Japanese friction, as the first days of hostilities made clear. On August 1, following Japanese occupation of Tientsin, a band of White Russians looted and wrecked the premises of the Soviet Consulate. A formal Soviet protest, accompanied by a proposal for an impartial investigation commission, was presented at Tokyo, but the Japanese authorities disclaimed all responsibility for the raid and rejected the proposed inquiry.⁹⁷ Before the month was out, this incident was superseded by a more significant event: the announcement—on August 29—of a Sino-Soviet treaty of non-aggression.⁹⁸ Japanese charges that the treaty contained secret provisions for special Russian military aid to China were formally denied by the Chinese government on September 8.⁹⁹ Sino-Soviet relations had thus registered a full turn since the hostility which marked the 1927-1932 period; like the earlier resumption of relations in 1932, this Sino-Soviet pact was a direct result of Japanese aggression in China.

During September a series of minor disputes, including detention of Japanese fishing vessels, difficulties over the working of the North Sakhalin oil concession, and the closing of Japanese con-

89. *The Japan Advertiser* (Tokyo), April 25, 1937.

90-91. *New York Herald Tribune*, April 22, May 6, 1937.

92-93. *New York Times*, June 27, 1937; *New York Herald Tribune*, June 30, 1937.

94-95. Reports on casualties conflicted. The Russians admitted one vessel damaged, with two Soviet citizens killed and three wounded; the Japanese claimed the sinking of one Soviet gunboat and the damaging of another, with 37 Russians killed. *New York Times*, July 1, 2, 1937.

96. *New York Times*, July 3, 1937.

97. *Ibid.*, August 14, 1937.

98. The pact, signed August 21, was valid for five years. For text, cf. *ibid.*, August 30, 1937.

99. *New York Herald Tribune*, September 9, 1937.

ulates at Novosibirsk and Odessa, clouded Soviet-Japanese relations. These issues were climaxed on September 27 by a stiff warning from the Soviet government, declaring that it would place "entire responsibility" on the government of Japan should an allegedly planned bombing of the Soviet embassy at Nanking occur.¹⁰⁰ During these early months of the war, the Soviet authorities experienced much greater concern, even though unexpressed, over the Japanese military occupation of Inner Mongolia.¹⁰¹ Later, as the Chinese guerrilla movement obtained military control of the greater part of the regions surrounding the Japanese-occupied railway corridors in North China, this concern materially lessened. A spectacular but calculated indiscretion occurred on October 25 when General Sadao Araki, a member of the Japanese government's Advisory Council, declared that it was "probably necessary for Japan to strike directly against Russia" to eliminate communism in the Far East, and that "America and England should cooperate with Japan in solving the world problem."¹⁰² This outburst was protested by the Soviet government as "a direct appeal for war against the U.S.S.R."¹⁰³ In December the question of the fisheries treaty once more assumed prominence, but was settled by renewal of the original 1928 convention for a second year.¹⁰⁴

As the war in China progressed, the connections between the German-Japanese entente and the Berlin-Rome axis became steadily closer. The process occurred gradually, but its results were specific and definitive. In November 1937 the Italian representative at the Brussels Conference had openly championed Japan's cause.¹⁰⁵ On November 6, while the conference was in session, Italy formally adhered to the German-Japanese "anti-Comintern" pact.¹⁰⁶ Italian recognition of Manchoukuo followed on November 29.¹⁰⁷ In December a modification of the Italo-Japanese commercial treaty favored Japan's trade position in Italy's North African colonies, while Japan recognized the Franco régime in

Spain.¹⁰⁸ At this time the German Ambassador at Hankow, by transmitting Japan's peace terms to the Chinese authorities, had undertaken a delicate mediatorial rôle. This unsuccessful effort was followed by Chancellor Hitler's announcement—on February 20, 1938—of German recognition of Manchoukuo.¹⁰⁹ In May the Berlin authorities ordered home the German military advisers who had for years assisted in training China's armed forces; the last of these advisers left Hankow on July 6. Dr. Oskar P. Trautmann, German Ambassador to China, was recalled in June and not replaced. On July 5 a tripartite trade pact, involving Japan, Italy and Manchoukuo, was initialed at Tokyo.¹¹⁰ By the end of the first year of the war, the Berlin-Rome axis had thus been transformed into a Berlin-Rome-Tokyo triangle—and China had been deprived of its erstwhile German and Italian friends.

Persistent Soviet-Japanese friction marked the early months of 1938. Typical of the wide range of minor issues involved were the failure of Manchoukuo to meet the last cash payment due on the Chinese Eastern Railway, Japanese charges of Soviet participation in China's air force, detention of a Japanese plane forced down in Siberian territory, and the closing of Japanese consulates at Khabarovsk and Blagoveschensk. Trouble had also developed over the Sakhalin oil concession. As the result of alleged labor difficulties and Soviet obstructions, the Japanese had discharged several thousand Soviet employees and curtailed oil production. The Soviet authorities claimed that the Japanese concessionaire had violated Russian labor laws, and asserted that the curtailment—which deprived the U.S.S.R. of royalties—was necessitated by Japan's straitened finances and lack of shipping facilities.¹¹¹ Efforts to solve these and other disputes reached a deadlock at the end of April.¹¹² Two months later, this list of issues was temporarily eclipsed by the clash at Changkufeng.

On July 14 the Manchoukuo Foreign Office protested to the Soviet Consul-General at Hsinking against an alleged invasion of Manchurian territory by "a dozen Soviet soldiers" near Hunchun.¹¹³ Two days later the Japanese Chargé d'Affaires at Moscow was instructed from Tokyo to make a similar protest, including charges that the Soviet troops had dug trenches at Changkufeng. On July 19, after a conference between the Japanese War

100. *New York Times*, September 28, 1937. Following Japanese occupation of Nanking, the Soviet embassy was burned to the ground on January 1, 1938 by fire of "unknown origin."

101. *New York Herald Tribune*, October 3, 1937.

102. *Ibid.*, October 26, 1937.

103. *Ibid.*, November 23, 1937.

104. *Contemporary Japan*, March 1938, pp. 780-81.

105. Cf. addresses by Count Aldrovandi-Marescotti, *The Conference at Brussels* (Washington, Department of State, 1938), pp. 31-32, 64.

106. For text, cf. *Contemporary Japan*, December 1937, pp. 578-79.

107. A year earlier Japan had reduced its embassy at Addis Ababa to a consulate, and Italy had sent a consul-general to Mukden.

108. *Contemporary Japan*, March 1938, pp. 782-83.

109. *New York Times*, February 21, 1938.

110. *Ibid.*, July 6, 1938.

111. *Far Eastern Survey*, January 5, 1939, p. 3.

112. For details, cf. *Christian Science Monitor*, April 29, 1938; *Contemporary Japan*, June 1938, pp. 193-96.

113. *New York Times*, July 15, 1938.

and Foreign Ministers, a second protest was ordered; meanwhile, a Japanese soldier was reported to have been killed at Changkufeng, handbills demanding war were distributed in the streets of Tokyo, a demonstration was staged before the Soviet Embassy, and the Japanese press featured reports of Soviet troop concentrations in Siberia.¹¹⁴ On July 20 the War Minister summoned an emergency conference of high Japanese army officials. A sharp verbal exchange occurred that night at Moscow between Foreign Commissar Litvinov and Ambassador Shigemitsu, who had hurriedly returned by plane from a vacation trip to Sweden. Mr. Shigemitsu referred to the death of a Japanese gendarme, stated that he could not accept the contention, "based on maps that never had been published," that Changkufeng was Soviet territory, and added that unless a settlement was reached peacefully Japan "would have to reach a conclusion about applying force." The Soviet Foreign Commissar, in reply, declared that "the Japanese gendarme was killed in Soviet territory where he had no reason to go," that "whether the maps were published or not" did not diminish their importance, and that if the Ambassador sought to use "threats and bogies" he would get nowhere at Moscow.¹¹⁵

This stiff Soviet rebuff had a magical effect in Japan. On July 22 the Japanese government ordered the press to "minimize" the alleged invasion of Manchoukuo, reports indicated that popular sentiment was "almost unanimously opposed to taking steps that might lead to war," and the Foreign Office spokesman denied that Ambassador Shigemitsu had ever threatened to use force.¹¹⁶ By July 25 the atmosphere had completely cleared, and it was being suggested that Japan might take the initiative in proposing establishment of a Soviet-Manchoukuo border commission. On July 28 the Japanese War Office described the situation as "all quiet now."¹¹⁷ The world press generally viewed the outcome as a distinct back-down and "loss of face" by Japan.

This deceptive lull was broken by large-scale hostilities in the Changkufeng region, beginning on July 29. Despite conflicting reports, it soon became evident that a strong Japanese force had rapidly occupied an extensive area about Changkufeng.¹¹⁸ Of greater significance, the Tokyo War Office itself

admitted five days later that the Japanese attack which "drove the Russians from the Changkufeng hill was made upon the initiative of the local Japanese commander, and had not been ordered by the government at Tokyo."¹¹⁹ On July 31, nevertheless, the Japanese Vice-Foreign Minister had rejected a Soviet protest charging that the Japanese-Manchoukuo troops were "the aggressors in a border crossing" on June 29.¹²⁰ The officers in the field were explicit concerning their achievement. Communiqués from the Korean garrison headquarters at Seoul on August 1 stated that "the Japanese completely drove out the Soviet troops from Changkufeng" on July 31.¹²¹ On the following day the Soviet authorities nailed their colors to the mast by exhibiting to foreign correspondents at Moscow the maps attached to the Hunchun treaty of 1886 which showed Changkufeng to be Soviet territory.¹²² Intense hostilities continued for nearly two weeks. By August 10 the Soviet forces had driven the Japanese troops from the territory occupied in the surprise attack of July 29-31.¹²³

At this point, after previous inconclusive discussions at Moscow, Ambassador Shigemitsu accepted proposals for an armistice presented by Foreign Commissar Litvinov.¹²⁴ In accordance with the truce terms, hostilities ceased at noon¹²⁵ on August 11, with both sides holding the positions occupied at midnight of August 10. The disputed sector of the frontier was to be re-demarcated by a mixed commission formed of two representatives from the U.S.S.R. and two from the Japanese-Manchoukuo side—an important Japanese concession, since Tokyo had contended for years that Manchoukuo should be equally represented with Japan and the U.S.S.R. on any such commission. Shigemitsu, however, turned down Litvinov's proposal that an arbiter chosen from a third country by mutual agreement should be added to the commission. The documentary basis on which the pro-

119. *Ibid.*, August 3, 1938. The spokesman "would not reveal the officer's name or rank, other than to say that he was an officer belonging to the Japanese garrison forces in Korea."

120. *New York Times*, July 31, 1938.

121. *Ibid.*, August 1, 1938.

122. *New York Herald Tribune*, August 2, 1938. The Soviet claims have since been upheld by documentary evidence presented by neutral observers. Cf. Demarec Bess, *Christian Science Monitor*, September 10, 1938; also Cyrus H. Peake, *Amerasia*, October 1938, pp. 385-89.

123. The last reported communiqué of the Soviet First (Maritime) Army stated: "The disposition of our forces follows the frontier line," except for the region of a certain height where "Japanese forces wedged into our territory to a distance of 200 meters and our forces in turn wedged into Japanese-Manchurian territory for 300 meters." *New York Times*, August 11, 1938.

124. *Ibid.*, August 11, 13, 1938.

125. Actually at 1:30 p.m., with final positions fixed by agreement of the officers on the spot.

114. *Ibid.*, July 20, 1938.

115. *Ibid.*, July 22, 1938.

116. *Ibid.*, July 23, 1938.

117. *Ibid.*, July 29, 1938.

118. Soviet reports of July 29 indicated that fighting was occurring "on a hill two kilometers (1.24 miles) north" of Changkufeng. *New York Herald Tribune*, July 30, 1938.

posed commission would work was left unsettled. Litvinov suggested that the commission be empowered to work "with treaties and maps bearing signatures of accredited Russian and Chinese representatives." Shigemitsu agreed that treaties should constitute the "principal reference material," but insisted that "other materials"—none of which the Japanese had yet presented—should also be included. This difference of opinion has apparently been used by the Japanese to block any progress toward setting up the border commission.¹²⁶

The outcome of the Changkufeng hostilities exerted a soothing effect on Soviet-Japanese relations during the closing months of 1938. One significant new trend emerged. Soviet exports to Japan for the first eight months of 1938 declined from 8 million to less than 400,000 rubles, while imports dropped from 30 to 15 million rubles, as compared with the same period of 1937.¹²⁷ Friction continued over such issues as the last Chinese Eastern Railway payment, the Sakhalin oil concession, and suspension of parcel post service.¹²⁸ The chief disturbing factor, however, has been the perennial fisheries question. Statements by Foreign Commissar Litvinov on December 16 indicated that the Soviet Union would again consent to a one-year extension of the old fisheries convention, but that it would insist "for strategic reasons" on excluding 40 fishing lots from the number previously held by the Japanese. In reply to the Japanese Ambassador's protest that such action "would violate Japan's treaty rights" as guaranteed by the Portsmouth Treaty, the Foreign Commissar referred to the "anti-Comintern" pact as an instance of changed strategic conditions since the treaty was initiated, stated that Japan "seemed to be preparing to join an anti-Soviet alliance with Germany and Italy," and recalled that Lieutenant-General Eiji Tojo had recently declared that Japan must prepare for war with Russia.¹²⁹ In these conversations, Litvinov directly charged the Japanese with violation of the Portsmouth Peace Treaty of 1905, on which the fishing rights of the Japanese in Soviet waters are ultimately based.¹³⁰ These accusations considerably broadened the normal scope of recent controversy over the fisheries question. Despite a Japanese threat to send a naval escort for its fishing fleet if

necessary, the negotiations were still deadlocked at the end of December and the new year had for the first time ushered in a non-treaty situation.

Foreign Commissar Litvinov's remarks to the Japanese Ambassador indicated that the Soviet Union was paying close attention to the development of the "anti-Comintern" entente. The Munich agreement had notably strengthened Japan's faith in the potentialities of the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo triangle. Following Munich, two new ambassadorial appointments, Lieutenant-General Hiroshi Oshima to Berlin and Toshio Shiratori to Rome, had raised to prominence the Japanese co-authors of the "anti-Comintern" pact.¹³¹⁻¹³² Early in October there was considerable discussion in Tokyo of transforming this pact into a formal military alliance.¹³³ So far the net result has been somewhat less ambitious. On November 25, 1938 a "cultural pact" between Japan and Germany, providing for cultural interchange and mutual recognition of their respective "racial principles," was formally signed at Tokyo.¹³⁴ It was followed by reports of the ousting of Austrian Jewish musicians from the Kobe Music Conservatory, and by a decision to bar Jewish refugees from Manchoukuo.¹³⁵ More significant was the German credit of 18 million dollars advanced in equipment goods to Manchoukuo under the terms of the renewed German-Manchoukuo trade agreement, signed September 15, 1938.¹³⁶ Germany, as well as Italy, expects to receive preferential trade treatment following establishment of a unified puppet régime under Japanese auspices in China—which, presumably, will be speedily recognized by Japan's "anti-Comintern" partners.¹³⁷

CONCLUSION

At the opening of 1939, the U.S.S.R. occupies a stronger position relatively to Japan than at any time since the recent era of disorder began in East Asia on September 18, 1931. The intervening years have enabled the Soviet Union to overcome the glaring disabilities which it faced in the 1931-1933 period. Japan alone can no longer compete on

126. Cf. statement by Shigemitsu, *New York Times*, August 23, 1939; also *ibid.*, August 27, 1938.

127. *Far Eastern Survey*, January 5, 1939, p. 4. Even these totals were swelled by the products of the Sakhalin concessions as regards exports, and by merchandise payments on the Chinese Eastern Railway, in the case of imports.

128. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

129. *New York Times*, December 17, 1938.

130. *Christian Science Monitor*, January 10, 1939.

131-132. One of its chief German sponsors, Major-General Eugen Ott, had been made German Ambassador at Tokyo in May 1938.

133. *New York Herald Tribune*, October 2, 10, 1938.

134. *Tokyo Gazette*, No. 19, January 1939, pp. 28-31; cf. also *New York Times*, November 22, 1938.

135. *New York Herald Tribune*, November 28, 1938; *New York Times*, December 16, 1938.

136. Kurt Bloch, "War Loans in Eastern Asia," *Amerasia*, January 1939, p. 519. A year earlier the Otto Wolff syndicate had advanced a similar loan to Manchoukuo, amounting to some 27 million dollars.

137. *New York Times*, December 2, 1938; *New York Herald Tribune*, December 29, 1938.

equal terms with the scale and tempo of Soviet industrialization. The mechanical equipment of the Far Eastern Army, as demonstrated at Changkufeng, is superior to that of the Japanese armed forces.¹³⁸ The special character of the hostilities at Changkufeng, moreover, where the Russian troops carried a line of hills by frontal assault with little room for maneuvering, tends to discount the widely expressed belief that the morale of the Soviet army has been seriously impaired by executions and replacements in the ranks of its officers. Japan's main advantages have been its nearness to the scene of action, and its ability to rapidly mass superior numbers for attack. Today, however, nearly a million Japanese troops are dispersed over wide areas of China from the Great Wall to Canton. In addition, the Soviet Far Eastern Army possesses a more self-sufficient economic base in eastern Siberia, while new railway construction has brought this region into closer contact with European Russia. There is, finally, a highly developed Soviet fortification system along the Amur salient, as well as the undisclosed potentialities of an air offensive against Japan's industrial nerve centers.

These factors should serve to reduce the likelihood of war between Japan and the U.S.S.R. in the immediate future. The readiness of the Soviet government to halt the Changkufeng hostilities as soon as its troops had reoccupied the lost territory indicates that the Soviet Union still bases its policy on defense of its frontiers. Despite the obvious sympathies of the U.S.S.R. for the Chinese cause, as well as the direct bearing of the war in China on its own defense positions, there is little possibility that it will enter the military arena unless compelled to meet an attack by Japan. The likely sponsors of such an attack have always been the Japanese officers of the local Manchurian and Korean forces, who are inclined to be more reckless than the responsible authorities in Japan. Their enthusiasm may well have been dampened by the outcome of the clash at Changkufeng, although the explosive possibilities of the Soviet-Manchoukuo frontier can never be wholly discounted. Another factor also weighs heavily in the balance between war and peace. Since 1931 the general direction of Japan's advance has been southward into China. By May 1933 the Japanese forces were already knocking at the gates of Peiping and Tientsin. In the spring and fall of 1935, despite the tentative thrusts being made at Outer Mongolia, Japan's major efforts were directed toward establishing the "autonomy" of North China. At each period

Tokyo has decided that a war with the Soviet Union involved risks too serious to be faced. These risks have become still greater in 1939. The scale of current hostilities in China demands a far larger concentration of Japan's military resources toward the south, while the U.S.S.R. is an even more formidable opponent.

One more factor—perhaps the most important—must be taken into account. Japan is no longer isolated, as was the case in the earlier stages of the Manchurian conquest. Its policies depend partly on the strength, activities and plans of the Berlin-Rome axis. The German-Japanese entente, despite its "anti-Comintern" phraseology, was initiated mainly by the military circles of Japan and the more extreme anti-Soviet elements in Germany. It is no accident, even if unprecedented, that the respective Ambassadors of these two countries are now both generals. Today, more than ever, the Soviet Union's preparations for defense must face two fronts—the east and the west.

There is still room for doubt, however, as to how immediate the threat of a combined German-Japanese attack on the U.S.S.R. may be. The "coordination" of Danubian Europe must necessarily occupy Germany's attention for some time to come; meanwhile the Berlin-Rome axis still appears to have unfinished business to settle with France and Britain. This condition is even clearer in the case of Japan. If, in 1937, Japan had been able to carry out a localized military operation in North China and to establish itself firmly in Inner Mongolia, the situation would have been quite different—and much more menacing to the U.S.S.R. There is good reason to believe that Germany hoped for this outcome, and reconciled itself with considerable misgivings to Japan's extended campaigns in central China. The occupation of Canton—in part, if not entirely, an outcome of the Munich accord—has carried Japan even further from its original objective. Instead of consolidating a base in the north from which to launch an attack against the Soviet Union, Japan has taken a long stride in its drive for "southward expansion." Germany appears to have adjusted itself for the time being to this turn of events, and to be looking forward to a privileged position in Japan's "new order" in East Asia. This program, however, trenches rather on the interests of the Western democracies—Britain, France, Holland and the United States—than on those of the U.S.S.R. Facilitated by the lack of cooperation among the Western powers, Japan's drive has taken the line of least resistance—and will probably continue in this direction unless firmer barriers are thrown up against it.

138. William Henry Chamberlin, *Christian Science Monitor*, September 23, 1938.